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Media Relations

UNH Carsey Institute: Northern, Western N.H. Towns Most At Risk Of Food Insecurity

April 25, 2012

DURHAM, N.H. – Granite Staters in northern and western parts of New Hampshire are most at risk to experience food insecurity as a result of having fewer resources to buy the food that they need to stay healthy, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire and the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire.

This research was commissioned by the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire to inform its New Hampshire Hunger Solutions program, a statewide initiative working to improve children's nutrition and end childhood hunger. "One of the first steps in our work is to identify where the need is greatest in the state and where there are gaps in resources," said Ellen Fineberg, executive director of the Children's Alliance.

The research was conducted by Barbara Wauchope, research associate professor and director of evaluation at the Carsey Institute, and Sally Ward, professor of sociology at UNH, and presented in the Carsey brief "Mapping Food Insecurity and Food Sources in New Hampshire Cities and Towns."

"In more rural parts of the state, access to food, particularly affordable, nutritious food, may be limited by the need to travel long distances to grocery stores. The cost of transportation and relative lack of public transportation options, especially in rural areas, add to the challenge of access to food," the researchers said.

"Even when retail food stores are accessible, the type of food available may be processed or snack foods with few healthy foods offered, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables. Public programs are available to supplement families' food needs, but these may not be easily accessible to those who need them most," they said.



The key research findings are as follows:

- Based on two risk factors, 42 of the 234 towns and cities in New Hampshire are at highest or high risk of food insecurity, with most located in the northern and western regions of the state.
- Public food programs are available in most towns across the state but are concentrated, along with retail food outlets, in the southern towns and cities.
- Families in most towns at highest or high risk for food insecurity have access to some type of public food program, but because of their more rural locations, the retail or public program options available to them are limited.


According to the researchers, some of the places that are most vulnerable to food insecurity appear to have a deficit of food sources, both private and public. Both the quantity and quality of retail food sources and the availability of public food program sites decline with lower population density.


"In many places families have only one or at most two local places they can go for food, sometimes only a farm stand selling produce or a convenience store with limited fresh food, or the free meals offered at school, requiring them to travel some distance to purchase or obtain a broader range of foods," they said.


To mitigate the risk of food insecurity in these rural areas, the researchers said expansion of retail food outlets through the availability of economic incentives could increase families' access to food and their ability to obtain food affordably through SNAP and WIC. Similarly, increasing the number of farm food outlets offering these programs, given the large number of them located in rural towns, could increase

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rural families' access to nutritious produce.

Also, because public programs tend to target specific age groups or are offered only at certain times of the year, increasing the diversity of public programs available in these places — for example, by increasing the number of Summer Food Service Program sites, child care providers participating in the Child and Adult Food Care Program, or food pantries — could expand the options available to the more rural families, they said.

This research was funded by the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire as part of its New Hampshire Hunger Solutions program. To guide the initiative's planning process, the Children's Alliance partnered with Food Solutions New England to convene the New Hampshire Food Advisory Council, a diverse coalition of anti-hunger and child advocates, state agencies, farmers, and business and community leaders. The council is developing a roadmap of strategies to address childhood hunger which will be shared with government and human services agencies, policymakers, and families struggling with food insecurity or hunger.

The complete Carsey Institute report about this research is available at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/CarseySearch/search.php?id=189>.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy research on vulnerable children, youth, and families and on sustainable community development. The institute gives policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

The Children's Alliance of New Hampshire promotes policies and practices that enable all children to lead healthy and productive lives and to reach their full potential. For more than 20 years, the Children's Alliance has worked to improve child health and wellness, educational opportunity, safety, and economic security through research, coalition building and advocacy. For more information, please visit www.ChildrenNH.org.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

GRAPHICS

Variation in risk for food insecurity in New Hampshire cities and towns, 2010.
<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/carsey/foodinsecurity1.jpg>

Retail food sources in New Hampshire cities and towns, 2011.
<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/carsey/foodinsecurity2.jpg>

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T-hall

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